

Jacob & Leah

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, it definitely is the summer of the wedding, isn't it? Or the engagement. And that's a good thing.

That's such a blessing from the Lord. I know that many of you parents have been praying and praying and asking God to give your children a godly spouse.

And God is so good to us. And he's answered those prayers. And it's encouraged me to redouble my efforts to pray for my own children, that they would be saved, and that God would give them godly husbands, a godly wife, if that would be his will.

And I thought, because this is a sort of a unique season for our church, a special time that we're going through of young people getting married and starting families, that it would be good for us to see something of what the Bible says about marriage and having children.

The Bible is probably the most realistic, the least sentimental book you can find on marriage. It's completely realistic about the goodness of marriage and also the troubles that come with it, the difficulties.

[1:22] Out in the world, for the most part, marriage is not looked on very highly. It's not estimated to be something too important. I don't have to quote anybody.

I don't have to give you an illustration. You can look around and see. The norm is pretty much for people to shack up together for long term, even.

Who needs a piece of paper anyways? And because that is the way the world looks at marriage, it can be very easy for us as the church to go overboard, even, in the other direction, to think so highly of marriage.

It's easy to react. It's a little bit more difficult to be biblical. And so inside the church, we can have the tendency, and I'm not saying this is true of us necessarily or you personally, but where the marriage, the family, the comfortable house, the nice yard, the traditional, so to speak, American family is what it's all about.

It's where life really is. It's what human life is all about. And in the passage that we are going to look at today, in our passage that I had read for you, we see that actually both views are wrong.

[2:54] They're wrong in different ways. But the Bible takes us off that spectrum, and it takes us out of that tug of war between, you know, a sort of, I guess, a liberal position and a conservative position, so to speak.

It's probably not the best way, but to think of it like that. And it puts us into a third way, a biblical way. So we see that in the passage I had read for you.

So if you don't have your Bibles open, please open them to Genesis 29. That's where we're going to camp out tonight. And as I studied this chapter and this passage, I found some real help from Ian Duguid and Timothy Keller, and I wanted to acknowledge them because they very much stimulated my thinking about this passage.

I have three points tonight and two questions. And I want to lay that out for you, what those points are, so that you can know where we're going. The first point is that Jacob comes up empty.

The second point is that Leah comes up empty. The third point is that Leah makes a breakthrough. And then the two questions are, why Leah?

[4:06] And so what? So the first point, Jacob comes up empty. We have to go back in time and in the story a little bit to hit this passage full on and to understand it.

Remember that God made a covenant with Jacob's grandfather, Abraham. And children, a covenant is a special promise that connects two people together.

So when your moms and your dads were married and they had their wedding, they exchanged promises and they were very special promises that connected them together.

And God made a covenant with Abraham that through him and through his one of his seed, he would bless the world.

He would bless the whole world. And so one person in each generation would carry that promise that one of the seed would be a blessing to the whole world.

[5:08] And so at any one time from Abraham's time to the time of our savior, the Messiah, there was a, there was a one person who was going to be the mother or the father of the Messiah, the savior of the world.

So Abraham had Isaac and Isaac received the promise that the promise passed to Isaac. And then Isaac had two sons. You remember he had Esau and Jacob.

And God said that the older will serve the younger. And that's his way of saying that the younger Jacob would receive the promise from God, not Esau.

Now, if you remember, Isaac didn't particularly like that plan. He didn't like that very much.

He favored Esau. He was planning to bless Esau. He preferred Esau. And so growing up in that situation and out of his sinful heart, Jacob became a conniver, a sneaky person, a deceiver, a con man.

[6:15] And he learned to cheat and he learned to steal and he learned to lie in order to get what he wanted. Well, all that conniving didn't turn out well at all.

And he ended up having to flee his, his hometown. He had to flee his family and he ran away from the land. He knew from the family. He knew from the promise of God.

Even he ran away from the birthright. He ran away from everything. And you remember along the way, God still met him. And he said, Jacob, this, you can't run away from me ultimately.

But Jacob was running away. And so he came to Laban's house, his uncle. And one of the first persons he saw was Rachel.

Rachel. It was, it was, it was love at first sight. The birds sang, the flowers bloomed. I was thinking about Bambi.

[7:13] If you've seen that movie, he was Twitter painted. He, uh, his life changed. Love is a powerful thing. It's a life changing thing.

That's why song of songs keeps on saying, don't awaken love until it's time. Don't, don't do it. Be careful. Why? Because love is as strong as death.

It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love. Rivers, rivers cannot wash it away. So you could have dumped the Mississippi river into Jacob's heart.

And it would have changed the way he felt about Rachel. He was crazy in love with Rachel. He wanted her bad. So we get to our passage.

After a month of him being there, Laban says, you're a relative of mine, but it's not right that you should, you should work for free. So tell me what your wages should be. What do you want your wages to be?

[8:14] And without hesitating, Jacob says, I'll work seven years for Rachel. Now, that doesn't mean very much to us because we don't know bride prices and we don't know dowries and we don't know what the normal wage for a man would have been.

But as one commentator points out, this is an absolutely ridiculous good deal for Laban. Jacob is working for twice as, you know, for twice as long as he really has to in any length.

He wanted Rachel. Why? Because she was lovely in form. She had a very nice body.

She was beautiful. She had a beautiful face. And Jacob was in love with her. I don't think he was so much in love with her brain or her heart.

These are what attracted him to her. He wanted her. Well, Laban sees what's going on. And for once in his life, Jacob took on his equal in the conniving and then the sneaking and the deceitful department.

[9:33] Laban was God's instrument to really teach Jacob a lesson. So he said, Laban said, sure, you can have her. You can have her.

He didn't reveal anything else of what he was planning. He didn't reveal any of the local customs and the local necessities. He, he, Jacob thought he knew what he was getting. But with Laban, what you think you are getting is never what you're going to get.

It's not the same thing. So Jacob works seven years. And it was like nothing. He loved Rachel so much. And at the end of the seven years, Jacob said, came to Laban and he said, give me my wife.

My time is completed and I want to lie with her. How's that for asking your future father-in-law for his daughter's hand in marriage? Um, the years haven't made the passion go away. It's only really made it stronger. Uh, and I think it makes complete sense because Jacob had walked away from everything that he had known his whole past life, everything that he had security in before.

[10:43] Uh, he never really had his father's full love. Isaac favored Esau. He didn't have anything to his name, but Rachel, Rachel was the center of his attention, the object of his affections.

This was going to be what did it for him that fixed it. His heart attached itself to her. If he had her, life would be good.

If he had her, life would be grand. If he had her, he would be happy. He wouldn't be lonely. Those are the things that a lovesick single person tells themselves.

And I think it's not too much to assume that that's what Jacob was thinking. And so the day of the wedding happens. The day of the wedding happens. Jacob probably drinks too much.

And so I think it's the only sensible explanation. It was dark. He wasn't sober. He goes in to be with his wife. He sleeps with her. And in the morning, behold, it was Leah.

[12:00] It was Leah. He worked. And he worked for seven years. He invested emotional energy. His excitement, his expectations were all on Rachel.

He poured his life out for her. She was going to fix his problems. She was going to make everything worthwhile. If he could just have her, it would be good. But in the morning, it was Leah.

And I think it's a perfect picture of what can be so wrong about the world's view of romance. Of how many teenage boys and girls and young adults and even middle-aged men and women fall into this. It's one person called it the apocalyptic romance. Where it's the life altering. Falling in love with this one individual. Finding them.

It's an idolatry of finding that one person. And if you could just find that one person and have him or her. Then all your dreams would come true.

[13:07] Life would be worth having. If I could just have him. Just have her. Listen to how one secular writer put it. And I think this is so perceptive.

Listen to what he said. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one's life.

After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to the position of God?

We want redemption. Nothing less. We want to be rid of our faults. Of our feelings of nothingness.

We want to be justified to know that our creation has not been in vain.

That was the secular atheist writing about what people do in our world in romance.

So what do we do when we put all of our eggs into that basket of marriage and sex and romance?

When we make a God out of our partner.

[14:11] Out of our lover. Out of the object of our desire. Well, we seek our redemption from them. We feel like they're going to fulfill us.

They're going to take care of our problems. I think so many people marry because they think that person is the answer to their problems. We want to be justified to know that our creation has not been in vain.

So what did Jacob find at the end of the day? Or in the morning? It was Leah. Behold, it was Leah. In the morning, he came up empty.

Romance, sex, it didn't work. Now, as you carefully read this passage, you can't help but feel sorry for Leah. And so I don't say this to be mean to her.

But whenever we do make romance. Outside of marriage or inside of marriage. A God. Then it's going to be Leah in the morning.

[15:16] It's going to be a disappointment. We're not going to get what we thought we were getting. Because people, humans, we can't bear the weight of divinity.

We can't bear the load of being someone's God. Can we? Then we have to be perfect. And we can't ever mess up. And we can't have any of our own problems.

And so when we put that pressure on someone else. When we put that expectation on someone else. They inevitably fail. They inevitably disappoint us.

People can't do what God can only do. Fix our problems. Make us better. Make our life worth living.

And what is impossible with man is only possible with God.

So Jacob came up empty. Now secondly, Leah comes up empty. Let's talk about Leah. Let me ask you young ladies.

[16:17] If you're single. How would you feel, young ladies, if your dad had to trick a boy? Had to dress you up like your sister. So that a boy would marry you.

It would be funny or something if it was happening on TV. But it was real life.

He had to dress her up like her sister in order to get some boy to marry her. Her whole life, her sister had been the beautiful one. Her sister had the attention.

Her sister was lovely in form, but Leah had weak eyes. I don't think that means that she couldn't see very well. Like she needed glasses. It doesn't say Leah had weak eyes and Rachel could see a mouse at a mile away.

It says Leah had weak eyes and Rachel was beautiful in form. Obviously Leah had some sort of defect. Maybe she was cross-eyed or something.

[17:22] That's not funny really, but maybe it was. And so when this new, young, eligible bachelor comes to town, Jacob, he loved Rachel.

And Leah is totally invisible. He falls head over heels in love with her, but Leah is invisible. It's like she doesn't even exist except as part of the side story. So here is Leah playing second fiddle to her younger sister, her beautiful sister, pushed around, felt sorry for her.

Dad probably viewed her just as a problem to unload on someone, to be fixed somehow. And then when she got married, it didn't really get any better.

Look at verse 31. Such a sweet verse. When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb.

So God moves in mercy, in love for Leah. He sees that Leah is not loved. And so he reaches out to her. He moves in love for the unloved one, for the sad one, for the invisible one.

[18:28] But as you read, Leah receives this blessing, but she's still in some way putting her hope in something other than God.

As she has children, she talks about them. And you know that our words reveal what's going on in our heart. And so we get an insight into what's going on in Leah's heart.

What is she longing for? What is she hoping in? And we're going to see it's not really God. She's recognizing the blessings are coming from God, but her heart is still going out for something else.

So she becomes pregnant and had Reuben. Reuben means he sees. So the Lord, it's because the Lord has seen my misery. So far, so good.

This is in verse 32. It's because the Lord has seen my misery. Then the next sentence. Surely, my husband will love me now.

[19:36] So surely. Surely, my husband will love me now. What did poor Leah want? She wanted her husband's love.

And she thought having a child would do it. Maybe my husband will see me now. The Lord has seen me. Maybe my husband will see me now.

The Lord isn't quite good enough. She needs her husband to see her. Well, he didn't really. So she conceives again.

And has baby Simeon. And Simeon means one who hears. So Reuben, as he sees. Simeon, as he hears. Because the Lord heard that I am not loved. He gave me this one too.

And I think, again, she ultimately wants Jacob. Again, she wants Jacob's love. She wants Jacob to hear. I'm not loved.

[20:31] And so maybe I'll be loved now. Maybe my husband will hear me now. And again, it doesn't work. She conceives again.

And she says, now at last my husband will become attached to me. So she named him Levi, which means attached. Do you see Leah's heart?

She's partially recognizing the blessing coming from God. But at the same time, her heart is reaching out and desperate for her husband. Not satisfied.

She feels invisible. She doesn't feel whole. She doesn't feel whole. Now, in one way, Leah is living for traditional family values. She wants a marriage.

She wants a better marriage. She wants her kids and her husband to be together. And she keeps running into the problem that it's not working.

[21:29] And at the end of the day, Rachel is still the favorite. Leah is still invisible. She isn't heard. She isn't seen.

She's not attached. And I'm not beating up Leah. She's in a terrible position. She is in a terrible position. And what she wants makes so much sense.

But God is calling her to something higher. And God is calling her to find all of her joy. All of her peace. All of her rest and her security in him.

But her heart is still wrestling with it. Do you ever do that? Do you ever have where your heart is half on God and half on the thing that you want, the thing that you think you need so much?

Well, Leah is in that position. Jacob wanted romance. He had it. He wanted sex and the love that Rachel could provide. He's sort of a liberal version of the world.

[22:33] And he comes up empty. But Leah wants a husband. And she wants kids. And she wants the normal family life. And then she comes up empty, too. But then finally, we have a breakthrough.

This is point three. We read it in verse 35, the last verse of the chapter. She conceived again. And when she gave birth to a son, she said, this time I will praise the Lord.

So she named him Judah. And it seems finally, at last, there was a breakthrough. There is no, I feel invisible or I don't feel seen.

I'm not heard. There's none of I want my husband's love more than I'm getting it. She rose above her husband's failure, her husband's lack of love and her weakness and her insecurity.

And now with both eyes on the Lord, she says, now I will praise the Lord. So she took Judah, this little baby, as the kindness and the grace and the goodness of God.

[23:41] She received Judah as a gift and not a tool to be used, not as someone to be used to get her husband what she really wanted. And so for a moment, at least, Leah found joy.

She found joy in God's grace and knowing that God loved her and that God had his eyes on her and God saw her and heard her. She didn't need to fight for her husband's attention.

She knew that the Lord loved her and that he was good to her. And so she praised him. It took four children. But God finally got through to Leah.

And we can't ridicule her because we aren't any better. Our Lord is so patient with us, isn't he?

Our Lord is so patient. And at last with Judah, God got Leah's heart. Now, if you read on into the next chapters, you know she's not perfect.

[24:42] But at least with Judah, the sun broke through and there was a breakthrough. And of course, who eventually came from Judah? Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus, the lion of the tribe of Judah. Jacob would later prophesy, the scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he comes to whom it belongs. And the obedience of the nations is his. One of Judah's descendants is going to rule the nations. So God promised Abraham a seed.

And through that seed, the blessing would come to all the earth. And it would be from Judah. The son of Leah. The unloved one. The unbeautiful.

The not beautiful. He didn't choose Rachel. The beautiful one. The favored one. The special one. He chose Leah.

[25:42] And that brings us to our next point. Why Leah? Why did he choose Leah? I think partially because that's the kind of God he is.

That God isn't really in the business of saving the super special. He isn't really in the business of saving the mighty, the wise, the beautiful.

He chooses the weak to shame the strong. He chooses the foolish to shame the wise. He loves to love the unlovely because that honors him.

He loves to love the underdog. He loved Leah and gave her that special role. Because he loves to exalt the humble.

And Leah is in this humbled position of nobody seeing her, nobody loving her, nobody taking care, you know, really paying any attention to her. And he turns the whole world on its head.

[26:41] And he does it for his own glory. Well, why Leah? Another reason is simply this. Because Jesus really was going to become the son of Leah.

And what I mean is that no one wanted Leah. Laban didn't want her. Jacob didn't want her.

And nobody wanted Jesus. Do you remember the Easter sermon that Pastor John preached? How many people came to Jesus' funeral?

Hundreds of people came to our dear sister Letty's funeral. But only four or five people came to Letty's Savior's funeral. There was no one around, really.

He became the despised one. He became the one that no one heard. He came to his own. And his own didn't receive him. They didn't want him. He became the invisible one, the unloved one.

[27:48] On the cross, he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He cried out, but God didn't hear. He cried out, but God didn't see.

Jesus became the son of Leah on the cross for sinners' gain. And so the son of Leah, he came to save the unlovely, to bring in the unloved.

And that's why we get to hear so much of Leah and see her so much in this passage, because she is the mother of our Lord in a very distant way. She becomes a picture of our Lord.

And so she had a privilege in her loneliness and in her brokenness to be the far-off mother of Jesus. And I was thinking, do you think now that Leah regrets that?

Do you think she regrets the pain and sorrow that she went through? Well, finally, so what? So what? What are some of the ways that we can practically think through this passage and work this out and apply it to ourselves?

[29:01] So what? Well, a couple of things. Are you lonely? Afflicted? Do you feel perhaps invisible in your own marriage? Are you the unloved one?

Are you single and you feel invisible? Are you a Leah? Leah. Jesus knows. Jesus became the son of Leah.

Jesus sees and Jesus hears the afflicted. Read through the Gospels. A homework assignment.

Read through the Gospels and count how many times it says Jesus saw and had compassion.

Jesus is the God-man who has his eyes open and his heart open to those who need compassion.

Jesus became invisible and lonely in order to help us. And so when we ourselves are invisible and lonely, Jesus sees, Jesus understands.

[30:07] He takes. And so take heart. You can rest your heart in him. You can bring your sorrows to him and put them at his feet because he knows.

Secondly, don't let your marriage surprise you. We saw two people in today's sermon whose marriage wasn't ideal.

They put too much in it. They invested too much. They thought they were going to get something out of it that they couldn't. They tried to accomplish with marriage something that really ultimately marriage can't fix.

And so be careful that you don't do the same thing. So if you're young and you're just getting married or you're young and you are getting, you are married or you're thinking about it, you're single, don't think that marriage will solve all of your problems and fix all of your brokenness.

Marriage only changes the place where we need Jesus. It doesn't change the fact that we still only we all we need Jesus.

[31:19] It just changes the circumstances that we need him. It's not going to fix our brokenness. It's not going to make us so much better people. It's only when Jesus is working in that marriage that there's going to be any good.

It can't replace him. And if you remember that, if you don't invest your partner with divinity where they have to fix me, they have to redeem me, they have to always be there for me.

They have to be the one that never messes up. Then you're going to save your marriage so much strife and so much trouble. You won't get so angry when your spouse fails you.

You won't get so depressed when your dreams don't come true and when life throws you a curveball. But remembering Jesus, remembering who he is and trusting in him will be a never ending resource in order for you to love your wife when they're or your husband.

And to forgive them and care for them. There's grace in Christ to love that imperfect spouse.

[32:37] And if you're single. Or if you're talking with someone who is single. Remember that in the morning. Marriage. It's going to be Leah.

It's not going to fulfill all your dreams. There's going to be disappointments. And I'm not saying that marriage isn't good and it's not helpful and it's not glorious or anything like that.

But we can't exalt it to the status of God. And so you don't have to be desperate to get married. Single person.

Paul was able to say, I wish everyone was like I am. I wish everyone a single person is able to care for the things of the Lord in a very single hearted way. In a very special and a wonderful way that a married person cannot.

And so you don't need to be desperate to get married because Jesus is enough. And then we all must remember that we are going to be single in infinitely longer than we were ever married.

[33:42] In heaven there is no marriage. There's no giving in marriage. We will be like the angels. So single person. Take heart. Jesus is enough.

And married person. Take heart. Jesus is enough. For you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do pray that you would give us faith to lay a hold of Jesus Christ.

And all of his saving power and goodness and rule and reign. That we would accept his grace and his law. His everything about him.

That we would take him completely. All for everything that we need. I pray for the marriages in our church. That you would save us from exalting them to such a status that only you could sit in that seat.

But give us grace as we receive help and strength from you to live in our marriages. And to do well in them. To love our spouses. To be patient with them.

[34:48] And not in any way to put them as an object of our faith. But to rely wholly on Christ.

And then out of that freedom to love our spouse. And for those who are single, I pray that you would please, if they want to get married, I pray that you would provide godly spouses for them.

If that would be your will. Do good to them. I pray that you would do good to each one of us. In whatever way that we need. To have sin opened up to us.

So that we know what's going on in our heart. Holy Spirit, I pray that you would do that. And you would unveil the sin. And the sinful ideas.

And the sinful motivations that we have. And lead us in the path of righteousness. I pray that you would bless us each as we go on our way.

[35:47] Fill us with joy as we believe. And it's in Christ's name I pray. Amen.